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ABSTRACT

Members of ethnic and racial groups, such as African Americans, Asian Americans, Hispanic Americans, or Native Americans, particularly those who are unemployed and living in low income districts, have continued to struggle to overcome social barriers. A review of the literature reveals that the lack of opportunity or means to overcome social and economic barriers caused by unemployment has precipitated a number of psychological and psychosocial disorders. Unemployed individuals who suffer from such disorders often need professional help. Leisure counseling, an approach whereby individuals are directed to meaningful leisure endeavors, is a process which can retard these negative emotions and behaviors while helping individuals develop feelings of hope. Such a leisure counseling program consists of: (1) the establishment of client contact; (2) the identification of the client's problem and/or area of need; (3) the identification of the client objectives; (4) the generation of program solutions; (5) the implementation of the program; and (6) continuous program evaluation. To implement such a program, however, decision makers of society must become sensitive to the existing need of this population for programs of this kind and public funds must be allocated to assure implementation. (Author/ABL)

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LEISURE COUNSELING: AN INNOVATIVE MEANS FOR COUNSELING UNEMPLOYED MINORITY INDIVIDUALS LIVING IN URBAN DISTRICTS

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to attempt to enhance the awareness of leisure counseling and how it may help improve the quality of life of unemployed individuals living in low income neighborhoods. Lack of opportunity to overcome unemployment and structural barriers are presented as factors that precipitate psychological and psychosocial negative behaviors such as delinquency, substance abuse, homicide and suicide. Leisure counseling, an approach whereby individuals are directed to meaningful leisure endeavors, is presented as a process which can retard these negative emotions and behaviors while helping individuals develop feelings of hope. Such a leisure counseling program consists of: (1) the establishment of client contact, (2) the identification of the client's problem and/or area of need, (3) the identification of client objectives, (4) the generation of program solutions, (5) the implementation of the program, and (6) continuous program evaluation. To implement such a program however, decision makers of society must become sensitive of the existing need of this population and public funds must be allocated to assure implementation.

Introduction

The United States is comprized of a diversity of ethnic and racial groups, of which the greatest proportion of these are either African American, Asian American, Hispanic American or Native American. Members of these groups, particularly those who are unemployed and living in low income districts, have continued to struggle to overcome social barriers such as those imposed by the limited opportunities of the segregated environment they dwell in, and economic barriers such as those imposed by the lack of spending power attributed to such individuals (Gibbs, 1988). As a result, individuals such as these have been denied integration into mainstream society.

A review of literature reveals that the lack of opportunity or means to overcome social and economic barriers caused by unemployment has precipitated a number of psychological and psychosocial disorders. For example, in a study conducted by Whiteside (1988) it was noted that a correlation tends to exist between unemployment and ill health. Neustrom (1988) found that both larceny and assault are significantly correlated with unemployement. Daniels (1986) pinpointed that a relationship exists between physical and mental health and unemployment. Whereas Gibbs (1988) and Sue (1981) have noted the direct association between unemployment and depression, delinquency, substance abuse, homicide and suicide.

Unemployed individuals who suffer from negative psychological and psychosocial disorders often need professional help. The role of the counseling profession is to assure that individuals seeking

help are guided into situations in which they not only feel hopeful about themselves, but also feel hopeful to overcome any social or physical obstacles they may have. In attempt to eliminate negative psychological and psychosocial behaviors of oppressed unemployed minority individuals, feelings of hope must be sustained. Unemployed individuals must feel positive about themselves and hopeful for the future while enduring the stressful moments of the present. In an era such as the present, in which feelings of positiveness are associated with materialistic and economic gains, unemployed individuals are experiencing an added hurdle in pursuit of sustaining a good quality of life. Since buying power is limited for these individuals, the experiences which entice a good quality of life and a degree of perceived freeedom, are also limited.

Unemployment, although equated with excess free time, is not "free" unless it is perceived to be free (Dawson, 1987). A good job and income often determine the degree of perceived freedom. Individuals who have a good job and income are more likely to experience perceived freedom and feelings of satisfaction during free time. That is, the experience of a well balanced life, vis-a-vis a combination of work and leisure, can be said to be more favorably related to "well-being" as compared to a lifestyle consisting solely of discretionary time and low income levels. Discretionary time, without the leisure experience, can be said to be time engaged in meaningless activity. The result of such meaningless activity is often the time in which negative

psychological and psychosocial disorders precipitate (Godbey, 1985).

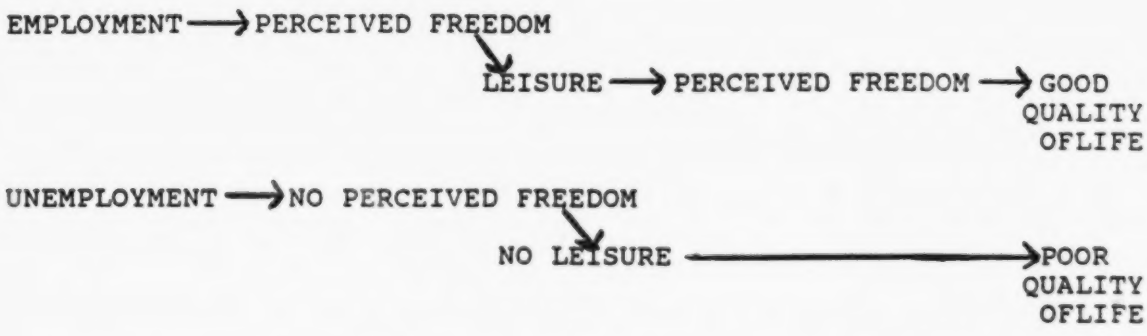
Leisure, a part of a well balanced lifestyle, is the experience providing the greatest amount of satisfaction during discretionary time. But what is leisure? After the obligations of personal maintenance are taken care of, individuals are faced with free time or leisure time (Dumazedier, 1967; Brightbill, 1960). Leisure however, consists of more than free time. It can be experienced only when a particular state of mind is reached (Pieper, 1952: deGrazia, 1962). This state of mind consists of the intrinsic feeling of happiness. According to Csikszentmihalyi (1975), leisure is experienced when you are involved completely in what you are doing without experiencing the pressures of external society. Complete involvement in the leisure state is enticed through deep intrinsic involvement in the leisure pursuit. The outcome of this leisure state is the purging out of negative emotions caused by limited access to dominant society and unemployment. Leisure, and the experience of the leisure state, can increase life satisfaction while simultaneously decrease or eliminate negative psychological and psychosocial emotions and behaviors (Kaplan, 1975; Tinsley, 1978). For unemployed individuals experiencing negative emotions and behaviors, leisure can can act as means to overcome these disturbing conditions.

For the leisure experience to occur however, unemployed individuals must experience perceived freedom (Iso-Ahola, 1980; Ellis and Witt, 1984). In order for unemployed individuals to

experience perceived freedom, necessary resources must be accessible. Individuals who are unemployed and living in low income neighborhoods tend to lack educational, economic and social skills required to help them seek these resources. Since unemploymed individuals do not enjoy the luxury of having a well balanced lifestyle consisting of work and leisure, leisure opportunities must handle the void caused by unemployment. The role of leisure is thus important not only for its own sake, but also for the compensatory experiences that evolve from it into other dimensions of life. The relationship between leisure and employment is not only compensatory, but also has a spillover effect with leisure undertaking a dual role in the case of unemployment. The outcome of the leisure experience, employment or unemployment, and perceived freedom all play instrumental roles in determining quality of life. In order for a good quality of life to be sustained, leisure must be experienced, particularly if employment is not. Illustration 1 depicts the relationship between unemployment, leisure, perceived freedom and quality of life, while highliting how leisure can entice personal freedom leading to a potentially good quality of life.

Illustration 1

The Relationship Between Unemployment , Leisure, Perceived Freedom and Quality of Life



A leisure counseling program can act as a guide to help individuals seek and experience necessary resources important for sustaining a good quality of life. The purpose of this paper is to introduce leisure counseling as a tool which may help improve the quality of life of unemployed individuals living in low income neighborhoods. To fulfil this purpose, this paper will illustrate the design of a leisure counseling program for unemployed minorities and for intervention in low income minority neighborhoods while depicting the state of unemployed minorities and describing the leisure counseling process. The main body of this paper has thus been divided into three parts: (1) the nature of leisure counseling, (2) the leisure counseling approach, and (3) the design of a leisure counseling program for unemployed individuals living in low income neighborhoods.

The Nature of Leisure Counseling

The concept of leisure counseling has existed since the mid-1950's when it was presented as a professional concern of hospital

recreators attending the Third Southern Regional Institute on Hospital Recreation (Sessoms, 1981). At that time, it was asked: to what extent should recreators attempt to counsel patients at the time of the discharge? (Sessoms, 1981).

Today leisure counseling expands beyond counseling patients for discharge. It has become a process consisting of meritous implications for all facets of society (Dowd, 1984). That is, leisure counseling has become a process which focuses on enhancing quality of life by guiding clients to seek meaningful leisure pursuits. The feature which differentiates leisure counseling from other forms of counseling is that it focuses on client's leisure as it relates to self-actualization (Tinsley and Tinsley, 1982): It is the goal of leisure counselors to help clients reach their leisure potential.

According to McDowell (1975), leisure counseling is a "helping process which facilitates interpretive, affective and/or behavioral changes in others toward the attainment of their leisure well-being" (p. 9). Similarly, Gunn (1977) has claimed that leisure counseling is "a process utilizing verbal facilitation techniques to promote and increase self-awareness; awareness of leisure attitudes, values, and feelings; and the development of decision-making and problem solving skills related to leisure participation with self, others, and environmental factors (p. 22).

More specifically, leisure counseling is a technique focusing on exposing an awareness of leisure to clients through the provision of educational and facilitative processess. The purpose

of leisure counseling is to provide satisfaction, adjustment, remediation and prevention to clients (Loesch and Wheeler, 1982). Leisure counseling is an approach in which individuals are guided (by trained counseling professionals) to understand the value of participating in recreation activities, locate available resources that offer these activities, and manage time and money to enable participation in them (Vining, 1989).

In sum, leisure counseling can be said to be a formal counseling approach in which clients are guided by trained individuals, using the fundamental principles of the counseling profession, into seeking and experiencing meaningful leisure pursuits.

The Leisure Counseling Approach

Similarly to clinical psychology, the leisure counseling approach focuses on tests, assessments and the development of standardized tools (Kinney and Dowling, 1981). More specifically, leisure counseling is an approach which "uses verbal and non-verbal techniques to assist individuals to increase their affective, behavioral, and cognitive leisure awareness and to develop the effective leisure activity selection and evaluation skills, thereby facilitating movement toward leisure mental health" (Loesch and Wheeler, 1981:71).

Literature reveals that a variety of models exist depicting the leisure counseling process (Magulski et al, 1977; Overs et al, 1977; Hayes, 1977; Edwards and Bloland, 1980; Tinsley and Tinsley, 1982). According to Tinsley and Tinsley (1982), the plethora of

leisure counseling approaches can be grouped into two categorizations with one being more holistic than the other: one consisting of information-giving strategies helping clients select activities, the other focusing on trying to understand value classification, client needs and thus helping program around these.

For the purpose of this paper, the leisure counseling approach that has been designed for unemployed minority individuals is a process integrating the notion of previous two approaches. It is a process that integrates information giving strategies helping clients select activities with the understanding of group and individual values. Below is a presentation of the design of a leisure counseling program for unemployed minority individuals living in low income urban districts while presenting a step-by-step analysis of the leisure counseling approach which has been designed for this case.

The Design of a Leisure Counseling Program For Unemployed Minority Individuals Living in Low Income Neighborhoods

In order to design and operate a leisure counseling program in low income minority neighborhoods it is pertinent that the decision makers of society become sensitive to such a need. Administrators of regions consisting of such low income neighborhoods must recognize the significance of such a program and make all possible efforts to allocate necessary funds for the operation of such a program.

Once the need is recognized and the provision of funds is allocated, project coordinators must be hired. Two groups of

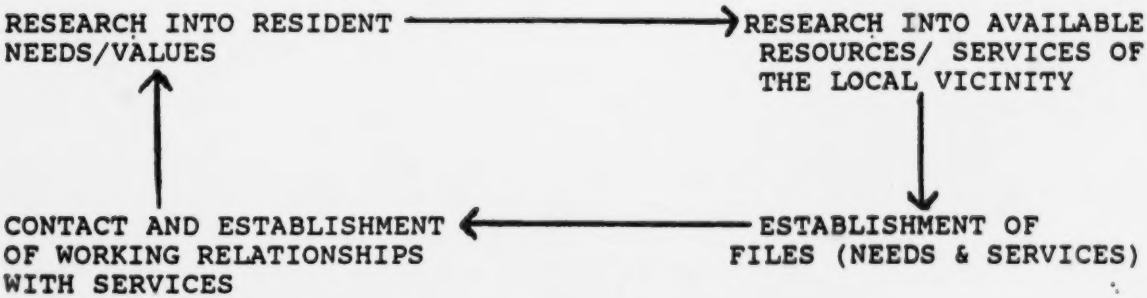
project coordinators must be hired. These include psychologists and leisure professionals having an awareness of leisure, counseling, the principles of leisure counseling and the theories of counseling. Leisure professionals will be responsible for operating the program, whereas, psychologists will be refered to for assistance and input in diagnosing the state of mind of clients. A "project manager" should also be hired. This individual should be a renown expert in the fields of counseling and leisure counseling and must possess the necessary leadership skills to sustain program operation. All staff members should possess the following skills necessary for counseling minority individuals: (1) basic knowledge of human behavior, (2) professional values, (3) self awareness, knowledge of one's own ethnicity and its influence on practice, (4) understanding the impact of ethnicity on the daily life of clients, and (5) modification and adaptation of skills in response to working with ethnic minority families (London and Devore, 1988).

As soon as the staff has been hired and introduced to each other, the next step will be to implement the program. The implementation of the program will consist of two parts: (1) the administration process, and (2) the leisure counseling process. The administration process consists of staff research into resident needs and values and available resources and services of the local vicinity in which the program is to be operated. Files concerned with resident needs and local services should be established. Contact and working relationships between program operators and

local services should also be established. Illustration 2 has been designed to provide a schematic diagram of the administration process of the program. Because of changing needs of clients, the interellationship between each process of the administation is highlighted, emphasizing that a continuous evaluative cycle takes place.

Illustration 2

The Administration Process of the Leisure Counseling Program Designed For Unemployed Minority Individuals Living in Low Income Districts


RESEARCH INTO RESIDENT NEEDS/VALUES
RESEARCH INTO AVAILABLE RESOURCES/ SERVICES OF THE LOCAL VICINITY
CONTACT AND ESTABLISHMENT OF WORKING RELATIONSHIPS WITH SERVICES
ESTABLISHMENT OF FILES (NEEDS & SERVICES)

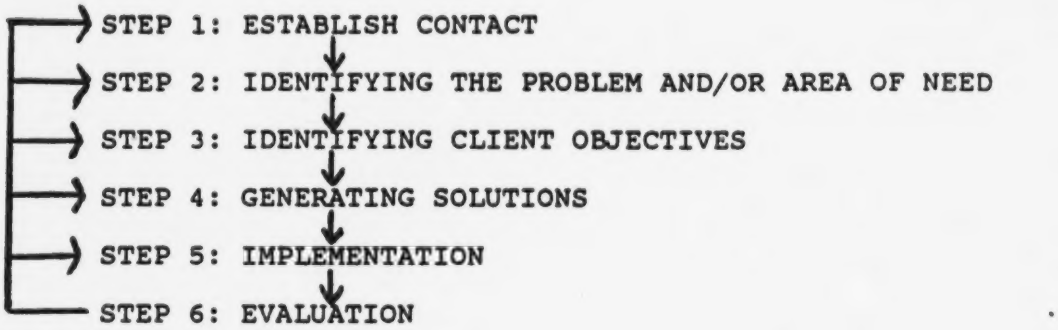
The next step will consist of the commencement of the leisure counseling process. It is relevant to note that this counseling service will operate out of the local community centres of low income urban districts. The service will be provided free of charge including free transportation to recreation services that are not offered in local residential districts.

The leisure counseling service will consist of the following six steps: These are: (1) establishing contact, (2) identifying the problem and/or area of need, (3) identifying objectives, (4) generating solutions, (5) implementation, and (6) continuous

evaluation. Illustration 3 presents these steps in sequential order noting that this process is a cycle one.

Illustration 3

The Steps of the Leisure Counseling Program Designed for Unemployed Minority Individuals Living in Low Income Districts


STEP 1: ESTABLISH CONTACT
STEP 2: IDENTIFYING THE PROBLEM AND/OR AREA OF NEED
STEP 3: IDENTIFYING CLIENT OBJECTIVES
STEP 4: GENERATING SOLUTIONS
STEP 5: IMPLEMENTATION
STEP 6: EVALUATION

Step 1 - Establishing Contact:

Original contact between client and counselors takes place. This step consists of the meeting of the client with the counselor. This is an introduction session focusing upon aquanting the counselor to the client and vise versa. The objective here is for the counselor to establish a relationship with the client making it possible to understand the clients individual and social development. To make this possible a comfortable, social atmosphere must be provided, with the establishment of a warm trusting relationship with the client (Tinsley and Tinsley, 1982).

Step 2 - Identifying The Problem And/Or Area of Need:

It is the purpose of this step to clarify the client's expectations for the leisure counselor and to clarify the leisure

counselors role. The counselor identifies the problem and needs of the client by becoming empathetic to his/her situation. The counselor tries to "place him/herself in the shoes of the client" in order to understand the thought process of the individual including life values, leisure values, life problems, leisure problems, life needs, leisure needs, etc. Emphasis is placed on understanding the clients historical background including personal values, with special efforts placed on understanding the clients life interests.

Step 3 - Identifying Client Objectives:

Attention here is placed on highliting the activities which may provide satisfaction to the client while correlating these with leisure pursuits the client is interested in pursuing. The counselor attempts to recognize these by directly asking the client while at the same time making activity recommendations.

Step 4 - Generating Solutions:

This step consists of the presentation of resource options available in the community to meet the objectives and possible activities discussed in step three. The counselor presents the client with a list of these, including "recreation facility or service contact names" wherever possible, while encouraging the individual to pursue these. Clients are requested to get in touch with recreation facility or service "contact individuals" to arrange for participation. If clients feel they cannot do this, counselors will intervene and help out.

Step 5 - Implementaion:

This step consists of the clients participation in the particular leisure options presented in step four. Wherever possible the counselor contacts recreationists to receive feedback on the clients' participation.

Step 6 - Evaluation:

The evaluation process which takes place not only at the end of the process, but also throughout it, consists of client feedback conerning the results of participation in recreation services. This stage becomes continuous after the first set of activities have been engaged in since interests and participation patterns are expected to change as needs change. After a duration of time, it is hoped that the results of evaluation will be positive and that the client becomes capable of pursuing and engaging in meaningful leisure pursuits without the help of the counselor. If and when this happens the client-counselor relationship is terminated.

It should be noted that this counseling process will consist of the basic client-counsellor relationship. A one-on-one relationship will be prefered, but if the need arises, group counseling sessions may have to be undertaken. To assure feelings of comfort and sensitivity in clients, counselors of the same ethnic background of clients should be utilized (Watkins and Terrell, 1988).

Conclusion

In the past few years, recreation has been recognized to be not only a right but also a must for all individuals. Despite efforts by the public sector to provide opportunities to experience leisure activities, the expansion of these opportunities has progressed at a slow rate. More specifically, it has progressed to an extreme in which recreation, with the current high emphasis placed on materialism, may be once again becoming something for the privaledged elite. If this is the case, individuals who need leisure opportunities the most may suffer.

The challenge is thus posed for decision-makers of society to recognize the benefits and potentials of leisure for individual's who need it the most. Once this is done, action must be taken to assure that all citizens entertain their right to leisure and utilize the potential of leisure. Leisure counseling is a means in which the potential to seek leisure experiences can be enticed.

This paper has described a leisure counseling program for implementation with minority individuals living in low income neighborhoods. Leisure counseling has been presented as a process which can deter the problem of unemployment while enhancing the social skills necessary to gain access into dominant society. The leisure counseling process that has been designed for this case consists of six steps: (1) establishing contact, (2) identifying the problem and/or area of need, (3) identifying objectives, (4) generating solutions, (5) implemenatation, and (6) evaluation. The purpose of the leisure counseling program is to reduce confusion

about leisure and its potentials, to enhance awareness of available leisure resources and opportunities, and to structure positive behavior change in individuals whose hopes may be deteriorating.

For a program such as this to be implemented however, coordinated efforts must be directed by regional administators, counselors, recreationists and operators of public recreation services. Most importantly the need for such a program must be recognized by the decision makers of society. Recognition of the potentials and benefits of leisure however are not enough. Action must be taken by decision makers to assure the provision of leisure counseling services and leisure resources to individuals who need them the most such as unemployment minority individuals living in low income districts.

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